

Agency 2020 Emergency Response Report
Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs

1. "Overview of which operations or services were reduced or suspended during the pandemic including whether the suspension or reduction was required by an executive order."

A. Suspended Programs and Services

OCRA staff transitioned to remote work following Executive Order 20-08. It is important to note that while many programs and services have been suspended, it was not due to Executive Order 20-08 but rather OCRA's ability to focus programming on COVID-19 related activities and recovery. The suspended programs and services include:

1. **Stellar Communities Program** – The Stellar Communities Program is a multi-year, multi-million dollar investment initiative led by OCRA partnering with several state agencies. The program works with communities to develop their strategic community investment plans, promote local and regional partnerships and implement comprehensive solutions to challenges facing Indiana's rural communities. As stated in Executive Order 20-05, Community Development Block Grant funds may be redirected to assist with COVID-19 needs based on guidance from the United States Housing and Urban Development. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Stellar Communities program for the 2020 calendar year has been suspended and funds reallocated to the COVID-19 Response Program.
2. **PEER** – Through PEER mentorship, partnered communities work together to enrich their community by improving quality of place programming and community development conversations. Driven by in-person assessments, stakeholder conversations, and peer advisement, a community gathers best practices and the necessary tools to help achieve their community's vision. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the PEER program for the 2021 fiscal year has been suspended. The funding has been re-allocated to fund COVID-19 responses and other related programming.
3. **Quick Impact Placebased (QuIP) Program** – The QuIP program has historically funded the type of space enhancement and community transformation that sparks community-wide conversation and creativity. Quality of Place has proven to be a driver in drawing new residents and resident retention. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the QuIP program for the 2021 fiscal year has been suspended. The funding has been re-allocated to fund COVID-19 responses and other related programming.
4. **Connecting Communities** – The Connecting Communities was a planned pilot program focused on designating two communities interested in aligning their vision for quality of place programming. Pilot communities would have been guided through facilitated discussions with community stakeholders to determine projects building on assets and provide a positive impact for both participants. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Connecting Communities program for the 2021 fiscal year has been suspended. The funding has been re-allocated to fund COVID-19 responses and other related programming.
5. **Downtown Development Week** – Downtown Development Week gives Indiana's downtowns the opportunity to showcase all of the positive activities and investments that are happening in their downtown. OCRA assists in highlighting activities that celebrate each participating community's unique downtown heritage as well as acknowledging and supporting all the businesses and services that are an integral part of the downtown. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Downtown Development Week for the 2020 calendar

year has been suspended. OCRA is instead partnering with the Indiana Small Business Development Center to highlight and promote Small Business Saturday for Indiana's downtown businesses. The funding has been re-allocated to fund COVID-19 responses and other related programming.

6. **Main Street Revitalization Program (MSRP)** – The MSRP encourages communities with eligible populations to focus on long-term community development efforts. This can take the form of business creation, increased tourism, historic preservation, and other economic revitalization efforts. As stated in Executive Order 20-05, Community Development Block Grant funds may be redirected to assist with COVID-19 needs based on guidance from the United States Housing and Urban Development. In response to the COVID-19 crisis and after utilizing OCRA's public hearing process for the Community Development Block Grant, the MSRP has been suspended and the funding has been re-allocated for OCRA's Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 Response Program.
7. **Public Facilities Program (PFP)** – The PFP improves the quality of place and assists in generating jobs to spur economic revitalization by funding community facilities and aiding in historic preservation. As stated in Executive Order 20-05, Community Development Block Grant funds may be redirected to assist with COVID-19 needs based on guidance from the United States Housing and Urban Development. In response to the COVID-19 crisis and after utilizing OCRA's public hearing process for the Community Development Block Grant, the PFP has been suspended and the funding has been re-allocated for OCRA's Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 Response Program.
8. **Blight Clearance Program (BCP)** – The BCP encourages communities with blighted properties to focus on long-term community development and revitalization through improving quality of place, generating jobs, and spurring economic revitalization. This includes the removal of deteriorated or abandoned downtown buildings or vacant/unusable industrial sites. As stated in Executive Order 20-05, Community Development Block Grant funds may be redirected to assist with COVID-19 needs based on guidance from the United States Housing and Urban Development. In response to the COVID-19 crisis and after utilizing OCRA's public hearing process for the Community Development Block Grant, the BCP has been suspended and the funding has been re-allocated for OCRA's Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 Response Program.
9. **Planning Grant Program** – The Planning Grant Program encourages communities to plan for long-term community development. Community leaders can apply for projects relating to such issues as infrastructure, broadband, downtown revitalization, and community facilities. As stated in Executive Order 20-05, Community Development Block Grant funds may be redirected to assist with COVID-19 needs based on guidance from the United States Housing and Urban Development. In response to the COVID-19 crisis and after utilizing OCRA's public hearing process for the Community Development Block Grant, the Planning Grant Program has been suspended and the funding has been re-allocated for OCRA's Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 Response Program.
10. **Indiana Main Street Community Exchanges** – Every year OCRA works with communities to host 4-8 regional Indiana Main Street Community Exchanges. These community exchanges are designed to bring Main Street communities from across the state to various locations to learn about best practices, new initiatives, and gain insight into other communities' unique approach to implementing Main Street. The exchanges feature learning opportunities, lunches, networking, and tours. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, all 2020 Indiana Main Street Community Exchanges have been canceled.

11. **OCRA Regional Conferences** – OCRA hosts 4-8 annual conferences within the various regions of the state. The audience make up for these conferences includes mayors, commissioners, clerk treasurers, town managers, community and economic development professionals, community foundations, Indiana Main Street directors and volunteers and universities. These full-day in-person conferences provide attendees education on programming and allow for best practice sharing. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, OCRA Regional Conferences have been suspended.
12. **Great Lakes Main Street Conference** – The Great Lakes Main Street Conference is an annual 2 full day in-person tri-state conference organized by OCRA which brings together leaders in downtown and historic commercial district revitalization from all over the Great Lakes region to highlight asset-based strategies to community and economic development. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the 2020 Great Lakes Main Street Conference has been canceled.
13. **Grant Administrator Training** – Every year OCRA holds new and continuing education for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program Grant Administrator certification. The CDBG program involves complex administrative and financial procedures regulated by federal and state policies. Knowledge of the applicable regulations and policies is essential to achieve a high level of efficiency in the oversight of grant awards. The needs of the constituents are more adequately met when training consists of multiple full days in-person training (rather than virtual) that require travel from all corners of the state, therefore, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, all 2020 CDBG Grant Administrator training have been suspended. OCRA has piloted internal training utilizing virtual methods in order to determine the best method for conducting the training in 2021.
14. **Technical Assistance** –OCRA works with local, state and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to aid communities in shaping and achieving their vision for the community and economic development. Historically, much of this technical assistance has been provided in person. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, in-person technical assistance has been suspended unless deemed essential. Technical assistance is currently provided through web-based meetings, such as Web-Ex and Microsoft Teams. This has allowed OCRA to cut down on the cost of staff travel and increased wellness and efficiencies for staff and communities.

2 “Overview on preparations to address future emergencies and recovery bases on the agencies experience with COVID-19.”

A. Future Emergencies

OCRA’s first experience with a statewide emergency was during the 2008-2009 flood disasters. Lessons learned from that time along with being a nimble and flexible agency has allowed OCRA to quickly pivot to emergency response and recovery efforts when faced with COVID-19. Preparations to address future emergencies include:

1. **Electronic Grants Management System (eGMS)** – In part with the Lt. Governor’s Family of Business agencies, OCRA has implemented an electronic grants management system utilizing a Salesforce cloud platform. This has allowed staff and customers to submit and retrieve information electronically pertaining to grants and applications, giving them immediate access to information and replacing the need for in-person paper submittals and

reviews. OCRA has also learned the importance of keeping the eGMS modular to allow for easy build of new programs when needed.

2. **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)** – In part with the Lt. Governor’s Family of Business agencies, OCRA has adopted and implemented an electronic CRM utilizing a Salesforce cloud platform. The CRM allows for statewide customer contacts to be updated and made accessible in real-time, community information and conversations accessible and allows OCRA to take a statewide look at trends and needs.
3. **Virtual Meetings** – OCRA has been able to successfully manage staff, stakeholder and customer meetings virtually through Web-Ex and Microsoft Teams. OCRA has also been able to collaborate and brainstorm utilizing Microsoft Teams and Jamboards.
4. **Telework** – OCRA employees transitioned to remote work following Executive Order 20-08 (Stay at Home). The agency experienced improved efficiency through this process utilizing available technology. Not only is this approach doable but a hybrid approach as well, since that is already OCRA’s business model given to regional Community Liaisons. OCRA has also been able to provide many trainings through Web-Ex and Microsoft Teams, minimizing the need for in person trainings.
5. **Community Calls** – OCRA was able to convene calls with key partners and stakeholders at the onset of COVID-19. These calls were grouped by local elected officials and Indiana Main Streets and provided emergency information but also allowed time for OCRA to receive information from the communities about what their hardships and concerns were in real-time. This also allowed communities to share best practices and connect with each other.
6. **Partner collaboration** – OCRA recognizes that collaboration with other entities builds capacity and minimizes duplication of efforts. OCRA has proactively met with partner agencies and taken part in collaborative coalitions and has found synergies and opportunities to partner in addition to educating staff of opportunities throughout the state that they can share with communities.

3. “Recommendations, if any, for legislation that may be needed to help ensure the agency is prepared to address future emergencies”

OCRA does not have any recommendations at this time.

4. “Recommendations, if any, for legislation to permanently repeal or modify any regulations or laws that were or are partially or fully suspended due to COVID-19.”

OCRA does not have any recommendations at this time.